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PREPARATORY COMMITTEE FOR THE
UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON
ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT
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Agenda item 2(c)

PREPARATIONS FOR THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT ON THE BASIS OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 44/228 AND TAKING INTO ACCOUNT OTHER RELEVANT GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTIONS: CROSS-SECTORAL ISSUES

Letter dated 17 March 1992 from the Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to forward to you the text of the "Berlin Declaration: Foundations for Global Cooperation to Promote Environmentally Sound Development in Towns and Cities" (see annex*).

The international conference of experts on "Promotion of Environmental Protection at Municipal Level - Strategies and Approaches for Action" was organized by the German Government and held in Berlin from 4 to 6 February 1992. This conference united experts from industrialized and developing countries, from local authorities, national governments, international networks and from international organizations, providing them an opportunity before the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development to exchange their experiences and to pass recommendations for Agenda 21.

The conference passed the "Berlin Declaration", which my Government hopes will be a useful contribution to the work of the Preparatory Committee for the Conference on this agenda item.

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* The annex is circulated in the languages of submission only.

I would appreciate it if this letter and the text of the Declaration could be circulated as an official document of the Preparatory Committee under agenda item 2 (c).

(Signed) Detlev GRAF ZU RANTZAU
Ambassador

ANNEX

Berlin Declaration, adopted on 6 February 1992

Towns and cities: concerned parties and allies in the protection of the environment

Foundations for global cooperation to promote environmentally sound development in towns and cities

Preamble

1. Concerned about the conservation of living conditions on our planet;

Noting supra-regional and global environmental problems which are caused by environmentally incompatible industrialization processes, rapid population growth, increasing urbanization, and human poverty;

Recognizing that the elimination of poverty and satisfaction of basic needs is fundamental to sustainable development;

Convinced that the fate of our planet cannot be divided between the first and third world, but that mankind has become an "ecological community" which shares the same fate;

Noting that today's economic relationships only bring prosperity to a minority of humankind, and that the consumption patterns of cities in the developed world are severely stressing the global ecosystem, while cities in the developing world need more raw material, energy and economic development simply to overcome basic economic and social problems;

Determined to solve anthropogenic environmental problems at their sources and to neither export them to people elsewhere in the world nor pass them on to future generations;

Concerned about the discrepancy between understanding and management instruments on the one hand and certain human behaviour and action from individual as well as from certain political and economic decisions on the other;

Recognizing that most economic activity, resources, consumption and environmental pollution take place in towns and cities, particularly those in the north, which at the same time offer special opportunities for an environmentally sound economy and infrastructure;

Recognizing that whereas one of the principal activities which pollutes the urban environment is energy production and utilization, the increase of efficient energy use to reduce its pollutant effects and to promote the use of renewable energies must be a priority in any action taken to protect the environment;

Aware of the fact that the citizens of urban and rural centres are directly affected by immediate environmental problems and global environmental changes and therefore have the obligation to participate in the formulation of environmental policies and the right to determine them;

Recognizing that municipalities are essential actors in the implementation of environmental protection as they represent the political and administrative level which is closest to both environmental and social problems and to the citizens;

Recognizing that fundamental decisions on land-use and thus on environmentally sound urban development are taken in urban planning and development at the municipal level;

Aware of the fact that the supply of housing is insufficient in many parts of the world and that building new human settlements enjoys priority; in doing so, however, environmental problems are to be minimized as far as possible by a consistent application and further development of the findings regarding environmentally compatible planning and construction;

Considering the increasing willingness of the municipalities to seize their global responsibility in line with the slogan "Think globally - act locally" which finds its expression in the establishment of transboundary and supra-continental town twinnings and urban networks;

Moved by the expectation that the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, which is to take place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in June 1992, will recognize and incorporate the local level as the lowest appropriate level of action, 115 experts from cities, national governments, international and interlocal organizations, non-governmental organizations and the scientific community at the invitation of the Federal Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Senate Administration for Urban Development and Environmental Protection of the Land of Berlin, and the German Agency for Technical Cooperation;

Came to Berlin from 4 to 6 February 1992 on the occasion of an International Experts' Conference: "Promotion of Environmental Protection at Municipal Level - Strategies and Approaches for Action" - to contribute to the preparation of the Conference and agree on the following priority problems and recommendations to combat them:

Problems and challenges

2. Cities are the place of major environmental problems. Although most of these problems are caused by activities at the local level, they arise, however, within certain framework conditions set by Governments and industries.

3. It is the local communities, the towns, cities and urban conglomerations which suffer particularly from ecological deterioration and which are held responsible for the consequences - be it as parties affected by environmental problems (air and water pollution, noise, waste) or by environmental catastrophies or be it in their responsibility for the disposal at the end of the industrial chain of production and consumption.

4. Since the last century, the proportion of people living in towns and cities has increased from 5 per cent to almost 50 per cent. This pattern can be seen in an even accelerated mode in the developing countries over the past 40 years. One could speak of a radical change in the structures of settlements or even an urban revolution. This urbanization is increasing considerably in both developing and industrialized countries alike. Of particular note are the continuing rural exodus and the associated concentration of poverty in urban areas in the developing world.

5. Despite the efforts of many cities and municipalities towards environmentally compatible urban development and some success in certain areas the general trends continue to be negative, the problems are increasing. The consumption of energy and resources continues to increase; the waste mountains are growing; motorized traffic with its negative environmental implications is increasing dramatically; the uncontrolled urban spread and rural destruction is still continuing.

6. Urban society, however, also offers unique opportunities to make infrastructure, production and consumption for a growing population environmentally sound and healthy. The number and density of producers and consumers in towns and cities allow solutions to be taken which are sound both in economic and environmental terms. The "ecological completion of the urban revolution" is therefore the central task of towns and cities of the future.

7. Towns and cities, however, cannot master their fate by themselves. In many countries, in particular in developing countries, local self-government is still too weak to directly respond to the problems and mandates with which they are faced. But even where strong local government institutions do exist, crucial framework conditions are laid down by state and national governments and private industry.

Towns and cities, for example, do indeed have the responsibility of disposing waste in most countries. But they have no important influence on its amount and its composition. These depend much more on state and national legislation and on private-sector production. Towns and cities are often the last stop at the end of the resource-use chain.

8. The extent and severity of environment and development problems demand joint strategies and joint actions at all state levels of government and between all sectors, including private industry, international institutions and non-governmental organizations. These partnerships are best achieved in the context of strong local self-government.

Since municipalities have to meet so many responsibilities in the field of environmental protection which are so important they must also be able to play their part in influencing the political, legal and economic framework of their action. Local government is considered an essential element for implementation of sound environmental policy. The International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) Rio de Janeiro Declaration of the early 1970s defined by experts the very essence of local self-government, and we refer to it.

Cooperation among towns and cities in the field of environmental protection must be intensified. This applies both to the influence that municipalities have on state and supranational environment policy and also to the exchange of information and experiences and the implementation of joint environment projects.

The past two years have seen hopeful signals with the new emergence of municipalities in international and intermunicipal cooperation in the field of environment policy and environment planning. Attention should be drawn for example both to the creation of the International Council for Local Environment Initiatives (ICLEI) as the environment agency associated with the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) under the auspices of UNEP and also on the setting-up of networks (Healthy Cities Project of the WHO, Sustainable Cities Programme of Habitat, Climate Alliance of European Cities, Megacities Project, CITYNET, Eurocities etc.). Towns throughout the world have also come together to impressive environment conferences in view of the UNCED to be held this year where they formulated their demands to the countries of the world (declarations of Bulawayo, Oslo, Melbourne, Villa de Leyva, Toronto, Montreal).

9. The transition towards sustainable development in our towns and cities and to a global environmental partnership in which towns and cities are able to play the role that is due to them, is on the agenda of world environment policy. The following general and specific recommendations should be taken into consideration in this area.

General recommendations

10. The Berlin Conference expects effective programmes from the Conference to protect the global environment and to secure sustainable development. The Berlin Conference also expects that consideration be given and improvements be made to the role of towns and cities in overcoming global and local environment problems and that their ability to contribute to solving problems be recognized and improved. Each local government is encouraged to develop and adopt a "Local Agenda 21" based upon the Agenda 21 to be adopted at the Conference.

11. The Berlin Conference believes that we should consistently work towards achieving the completion of the transition to an ecologically compatible market economy. This transition can only be made possible if the debt problems of cities and States are solved in the spirit of social and historical justice, if world trade agreements and international organizations

respect environmental and social rules and give sufficient participation to citizens, women's groups and other non-governmental organizations, local governments and regional councils. Only by achieving this will it be possible to reach the objective of a comprehensive, environmentally sound and sustainable development of the quality of life in towns and cities.

The main objective of the ecological market economy is securing a standard of living worthy of humankind while protecting the natural resources to the greatest extent possible and giving consistent protection to the natural basis for life, climate, air, water and soil.

12. Because of their proximity to the people living in the area, to the sites requiring action, and to the problems to be faced, towns, cities and communities must play a decisive role in the necessary process of ecological change. This change can only be achieved in a better way by democratic institutions, by the citizen and with the citizen. Towns, cities and communities should endeavour to increase citizen participation and to achieve a constructive dialogue and new forms of cooperation with all social groupings and initiatives. They should also unite in order to give greater political clout to their demands for the consistent application of an environment policy that takes preventive action and makes the polluters pay.

13. National governments are called upon to enact measures providing cities with the authority, including the raising of revenues, to implement environment friendly policies and actions, and to ensure that their own policies and measures take adequate account of the objectives of environmental compatibility, sustainable development and "urban compatibility".

14. The main objectives of future environment policy in towns and cities will be using the opportunity that the town as an organizational form gives us for ecologically sound development within society. In order to achieve this, practical steps must be taken to include the idea of environmentally sound, sustainable development in municipal planning and administration. This demands the implementation of strategies, new planning, organizational and technical solutions, new forms of cooperation and continuous education of those taking policy decisions and the staff working in administration.

Special recommendations

Strategies for environmental protection

15. Towns and municipalities should gear their action towards the following principles:

To avoid environmental damage if possible from the outset or to keep it at as low a level as possible (prevention before reparation);

To give priority to people's needs for clean air, clean water, health, sanitation, adequate shelter, environmentally sound energy use and transport;

To calculate in all decision-making the costs of any ecological consequences which may arise and to integrate the costs of use of the environment as far as possible into prices to be paid;

To take decisions on the basis of an environmental impact assessment and with adequate budgeting methods;

To promote indigenous developments adequate to the respective conditions;

To cooperate in the solution of interlocal environmental problems and not to work against each other by trying to attract businesses through low environmental standards.

16. Towns and cities should take part in joint programmes aimed at putting plans for environmentally sound, sustainable development for municipalities of differing structures and sizes in concrete terms and to bring them into operation. National governments, regional institutions and international organizations are called upon to give support to projects of this kind, both in expertise and in financial terms, to evaluate their results and to support exchanges of information.

Environmental management of towns and cities as a service for the citizen

17. The services which towns and cities should provide for their citizens include vital functions of supply and disposal. However municipal environmental policy must not be restricted to these supply and disposal tasks.

Towns and cities are also called upon to orient themselves towards the principles of an environmentally compatible and sustainable development when fulfilling these functions. This means putting an end to any waste of natural resources and making use of these resources only according to the capacity of the ecosystem to function properly.

In particular, municipalities are called upon:

To organize periodical audits of the environmental situation and to publish their results in regular environmental status reports;

To enter into discussions with the public on the goals for future municipal environmental quality to be achieved;

To use the instrument of environmental impact assessments for local planning and projects;

To develop the various synergetic instruments for local environmental protection into a comprehensive set of instruments of local environmental management;

To inform their citizens on the opportunities for environmental friendly behaviour and to offer the service of local environmental counselling;

To play themselves a pioneering role in environmental protection, for example, by pursuing an innovative procurement policy.

Capacity-building for urban environmental protection

18. In order to ensure a sustainable development towns and cities require local self-government with the capacity to act, sufficient sources of revenue, as well as possibilities to participate in national legislation and in implementing national and international programmes.

Where necessary, national legislative bodies are called upon to increase the scope of local governments to collect and retain fees on environmentally polluting activities from the polluter. Local governments should be placed into a better position to combat local environmental pollution and to better finance their functions of environmental protection.

19. When privatizing public services with relevance for the environment it must be avoided that profitable functions are withdrawn from local governments which then are left only with tasks which are cost intensive and have to be subsidized.

Local authorities must be urged to explore the full spectrum of administrative and management structures available to undertake service delivery. This spectrum should include the public enterprise framework that places the citizen as the customer, and that encourages profits to accrue to both public and private partners, and which complements and strengthens the privatization model now promoted by Governments and multilateral bodies.

20. Local governments are called upon to organize their governmental structures in such a way that the tasks of environmental management can be performed efficiently. What can be recommended is coordination of the functions of environmental protection with responsibility to the highest body of local government. Experience gained in large cities also suggests that environmental protection tasks ought to be organized on a cross-sectoral basis within local governments.

21. Towns and cities are urged to open up the exchange of information and experience between each other as well as to encourage dialogue and practical cooperation between local governments beyond national borders and continents. Cooperation within the framework of existing international organizations, of city networks or of other urban initiatives and appropriate mechanisms should be promoted to strengthen solidarity among cities through the creation of mechanisms and instruments (for example funds) to support local efforts in the developing countries for better management of natural resources and for the development of sustainable communities, to be financed by local governments or authorities, or other institutions or organizations.

22. Basic and further training of local environmental governments' staff as well as of those working in other government areas with environmental relevance ought to be given increased attention. However, it is not only a

question of imparting basic and technical knowledge of ecology but also of invoking comprehension of the interdependence of local environmental problems with global developments. Education and information in the informal as well as the formal sector should enable the different actors to find their own way of development and strengthen self-reliance and motivation for an ecologically responsible progress.

23. Local governments in the industrialized countries are called upon to support towns and cities in the developing countries in solving their most vital environmental problems. This might be achieved by bilateral partnerships or by participating in projects between different local governments within the framework of North-South cooperation.

Financial and technical cooperation

24. Local environmental protection and sustainable municipal development are important areas of financial and technical cooperation. For a long time technical solutions for individual tasks and special pilot projects for sectoral programmes have been predominated in orientation which only touched upon environmental protection problems in a selective manner.

Therefore, new approaches to financial and technical cooperation must:

Be based on several tiers of local government (from the work at grass-roots level to policy dialogue);

Promote environmental equity through programmes aiming at the reduction of urban poverty and ecological disparities;

Promote the integrated inclusion of environmental management into general local government activities;

Support, apart from the public sector, non-governmental bodies in a targeted manner;

Promote political dialogue to achieve greater financial and organizational independence from the governmental authorities for the municipalities.

Environmental challenges should not only be seen as problems, but also as business opportunities. Examples such as long-term stable markets for recyclables, creating new markets for alternative vehicles that have yet to be manufactured in meaningful quantities, and organizing municipal markets for environmentally sound commodities at low prices and high quality are examples of such opportunities. In order to appreciate such opportunities, local authorities and their associations are urged to consider new structural solutions that include the establishment of subsidiary corporations in partnership with private industry and central governments to effect action.

In this context the Berlin Conference welcomes in particular the initiative of UNDP, World Bank and of Habitat to give increased support to environmental protection in their programmes concerning local environmental protection (Urban Management Programme) and to make them flexible so that other donor institutions can also participate.

25. The Conference is called upon to take note of the interests and aims of local environmental protection also in the discussions on relevant multilateral financing instruments and to ensure that local government representatives are adequately heard when priorities are set and programmes developed and implemented in this context.

For this purpose, local governments are strongly urged to participate in the World Urban Forum to be held on 28 and 29 May 1992 in Curitiba, Brazil, and that national delegations to the Conference are urged to include representatives of local government on their delegations.

Agenda 21 should include a request to local and central governments, non-governmental organizations and private industry to collaborate on the implementation of the recommendations. The Conference is further called upon to define steps through which the currently divergent agendas from the South and the North can be harmonized more efficiently.

26. The participants of the International Berlin Experts' Conference on the promotion of local environmental protection request the present government representatives and, in particular, the representatives of the German Federal Government to exert their influence that these recommendations are taken into account during the ongoing Conference negotiations. The German Federal Government is called upon to feed the results of the Berlin Conference into the Conference process.